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Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing

Preparations for the Second World Assembly on Ageing

Report of the Secretary-General

Contents

		Paragraphs	*Page*
I.	Introduction	1	2
II.	Preparatory activities for the Second World Assembly on Ageing	2–24	2
	A. Preparatory Committee	2–4	2
	B. Format of the Second World Assembly on Ageing	5–9	2
	C. Revision of the International Plan of Action on Ageing	10–16	3
	D. United Nations system activities	17–21	5
	E. Spain, host country of the Second World Assembly on Ageing	22–24	5

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 54/262 of 25 May 2000, the General Assembly decided to convene the Second World Assembly on Ageing to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the first World Assembly on Ageing held in Vienna, Austria, in 1982. Further, in resolution 55/58 of 4 December 2000, the Assembly decided to hold the Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid, from 8 to 12 April 2002. The Second World Assembly will focus on an overall review of the outcome of the first World Assembly, as well as the adoption of a revised Plan of Action on Ageing aligned with the sociocultural, economic and demographic realities of the new century, with particular attention to the needs and perspectives of developing countries. In the same resolution, the General Assembly also invited broad participation in the preparatory process for the Second World Assembly including Member States, all relevant organs of the United Nations systems, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the field of ageing, as well as research institutions and representatives of the private sector. The present report reviews activities and recent developments related to this preparatory process.

II. Preparatory activities for the Second World Assembly on Ageing

A. Preparatory Committee

2. The General Assembly, in resolution 54/262, decided that the Commission for Social Development should serve as the preparatory committee for the Second World Assembly on Ageing and, as such, should be open to the participation of all Member States of the United Nations, members of specialized agencies and observers, in accordance with the established practice of the General Assembly. In February 2001, the first session of the preparatory committee was convened to discuss substantive and procedural matters regarding the Second World Assembly. The preparatory committee focused its discussions on the format of the Second World Assembly and on the content and structure of the first draft of the revised Plan of Action on Ageing. At that time, the committee took a decision to request the Secretary-General to submit a report on elder abuse, based on existing studies, information and documentation, to its second session in 2002.

3. At its resumed first session on 30 April and 1 May 2001, the committee adopted a decision on the accreditation of NGOs at the World Assembly.[1] The decision outlines the guidelines and requirements for accreditation of NGOs to the World Assembly and its preparatory process, with particular attention to the equitable geographical distribution of participants. The committee also recommended a draft decision for approval by the Economic and Social Council and adoption by the General Assembly on the participation of NGOs in the World Assembly,[2] which would allow representatives accredited to the World Assembly to address the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole and, given available time, to make statements in the plenary. In addition, the provisional rules of procedure for the Second World Assembly on Ageing[3] were submitted for approval by the Economic and Social Council and adoption by the General Assembly and by the Second World Assembly in Madrid.

4. A draft decision on the United Nations Trust Fund on Ageing[4] was also recommended for approval by the Economic and Social Council and adoption by the General Assembly. It urges Member States and other actors to contribute generously to the Fund, to support preparatory activities for the Second World Assembly on Ageing and, in particular, to facilitate the fullest participation of least developed countries. Funds may also be used to support public information activities to promote the Second World Assembly and its outcomes.

B. Format of the Second World Assembly on Ageing

5. While the major task of the Second World Assembly will be to agree on a revised Plan of Action on Ageing, it is envisaged that several activities involving the broad participation of different actors will shape the format of the Assembly.

6. In accordance with provisional rules of procedure and based on the experience of recent United Nations conferences, the Assembly will organize its work around the plenary and Main Committee (Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole). As discussed in the Preparatory Committee, the plenary will allow for a general exchange of views on the main themes of the

World Assembly while the Main Committee and other working groups will be responsible for preparing the revised International Plan of Action on Ageing for adoption by the plenary.

7. In addition to the political segment, parallel and associated events that will support the World Assembly include: (a) a series of round-table discussions under the sponsorship of the host Government; (b) an NGO Forum to be held in Madrid prior to and during the Assembly; and (c) a research forum to take place in Valencia the week before the Assembly.

Round-table discussions. The round-table initiative is expected to engage the global community in an extensive dialogue on key issues and challenges related to ageing. The main objective of the round tables is to promote extensive dialogue between Governments and major actors and constituencies of civil society. This series of round-table discussions is designed to draw on the expertise and experiences of independent experts, eminent persons and major groups with special interest in ageing. The broad representation at such round tables will reflect a geographical and gender balance of international personalities as well as older persons themselves. The exchange of recommendations on concrete measures, good practices and innovative experiences from this event would be disseminated in order to raise public awareness and media attention to the challenges and opportunities of ageing.

NGO Forum. A valuable input from civil society is expected at the NGO Forum scheduled to take place in Madrid, at the convention centre, Feria de Madrid-IFEMA, from 4 to 9 April 2002. Under the aegis of the Spanish Government, it is anticipated that the NGO Forum will provide an opportunity to strengthen the voices of older persons through the exchange of global ideas and experiences at the local, national and international levels from a civil society perspective. The role of NGOs in advocacy and raising awareness on key issues as well as on the implementation and follow-up actions of the revised Plan is expected to be addressed during this Forum. The meeting of the global community of NGOs is expected to feature discussions and debates on a wide range of issues structured around workshops, round tables and conferences. The summary of ideas from these activities may be presented to the plenary of the Assembly.

In addition, promotional events, information and advocacy campaigns by local, national and international organizations have been planned in order to increase the visibility of issues related to ageing. Exhibits and cultural events will be held to showcase innovative and best practices on ageing.

Valencia Forum. The scientific community will be actively supporting the Second World Assembly on Ageing through the Valencia Forum, to be held in Valencia, Spain, from 1 to 4 April 2002. The meeting will bring together international academics, researchers and professional practitioners of gerontology, geriatric and aged care, as well as representatives from the private sector. The Forum will also be an opportunity to link science with policy and practice.

8. The Valencia Forum is sponsored by the International Association of Gerontology and supported by the Novartis Foundation for Gerontology. Researchers, academics and specialists from the private sector concerned with the science and practice of gerontology, geriatrics and aged care will gather to pool their scientific knowledge, experience and understanding on how best to address the issues of individual and population ageing. In this context, it is anticipated that recommendations formulated at the Forum will contribute to the implementation and follow-up mechanisms of the revised International Plan of Action.

9. The format of the Valencia Forum will revolve around a series of thematic keynote papers, symposia and workshops. Based on the major priority issues identified in the United Nations Research Agenda on Ageing for the Twenty-First Century, the Forum will address the following themes: (a) ageing frontiers — data, information and research; (b) understanding ageing — knowledge, education and training; (c) responding to ageing — programmes, services and practice; (d) adjusting to ageing — reform of welfare and health systems; (e) impact and contribution of ageing — globalization, development and ageing; (f) players and partners — the roles of government, civil society and the private sector; and (g) embracing ageing — culture, concepts, philosophy, spirituality, art and literature.

C. Revision of the International Plan of Action on Ageing

10. The central task of the Second World Assembly is to adopt a revised International Plan of Action on

Ageing. The United Nations programme on ageing of the Division for Social Policy and Development, acting as the secretariat for the Assembly, has the ultimate responsibility for drafting the revised Plan. In preparing the draft, the secretariat has received important contributions from expert group meetings and panel discussions organized in collaboration with the United Nations system organizations, Governments, NGOs and civil society. The outcome of the three Technical Committee meetings, described below, has played a crucial role in drafting the revised Plan.

11. The Technical Committee was established based on General Assembly resolution 54/262, in which the Secretary-General was invited to establish a technical committee, funded through voluntary contributions, in order to assist him in the formulation of proposals to be submitted during the preparatory process. It is made up of experts who, serving in a personal capacity, come from a cross-section of professional and geographic backgrounds. One of its roles is to advise the United Nations programme on ageing on content of the revised Plan. At the first meeting, held in Frankfurt, discussions focused on the framework and format as well as the development and content of the revised Plan. It was agreed that the organizational framework of the revised Plan would be based on the concept of a society for all ages. Priority directions and priority issues for inclusion in the revised Plan were also identified. In addition, special consideration was given during the meeting to the question of how to ensure that, in the future revised Plan, particular attention will be paid to ageing issues in developing countries.

12. At the second meeting of the Technical Committee, held in the Dominican Republic, committee experts discussed and advised the secretariat on the main part of the revised Plan, specifically in the formulation of objectives and recommendations. At the third meeting, held in Vienna, experts discussed a wide range of issues for inclusion in the revised Plan, reviewed priority issues suggested by the secretariat and elaborated proposals for the monitoring and review of the implementation of the revised Plan.

13. The first draft revised Plan was discussed at the first session of the preparatory committee, which was held in February 2001. The first draft of the revised Plan submitted to the preparatory committee had two parts: the long-term strategy on ageing, as the preamble to the draft Plan of Action; and the main body of the revised Plan. The main body identified three priority directions for policy action: (a) sustaining development in an ageing world; (b) advancing health and well-being into old age; and (c) ensuring enabling and supportive environments for all ages.

14. At the meeting of the preparatory committee, Member States made general comments and forwarded specific suggestions on the structure and format of the revised Plan. Overall, support was expressed for the framework of the draft revised Plan. It was suggested, however, that the revised Plan could be more concise, focused and action-oriented, with particular attention to developing countries. Integrating poverty, human rights and gender issues were emphasized as was the need for a holistic approach to the Plan.

15. Member States were invited to submit additional comments on the draft revised Plan to the secretariat by 25 June 2001. In addition, representatives from the United Nations system organizations and international NGOs presented their comments on the draft Plan. Ongoing consultations with representatives of civil society worldwide also serve as input to the drafting process. For example, at a meeting of leaders of Latin American and Caribbean organizations of older persons, recommendations on issues that should be included in the new Plan of Action were presented and NGO leaders were briefed on the current draft of the Plan and the Madrid process. Furthermore, HelpAge International is cooperating with the United Nations programme on ageing on a project designed to ensure that views and proposals for action of poor older people are incorporated into the global preparations for the Second World Assembly on Ageing. Many of the comments from the preparatory committee meetings, technical input from experts and specific comments and recommendations from Member States and civil society have been incorporated in the updated draft of the revised Plan.

16. The preparatory committee has set the end of August 2001 as the deadline for the United Nations secretariat to the Assembly to complete the drafting of the revised Plan. This will allow time for Member States and the international community to review the draft before the preparatory committee resumes its first session to begin negotiations on the draft Plan at the end of November-beginning of December 2001.

D. United Nations system activities

17. Preparations for the Second World Assembly on Ageing in April 2002 are taking place throughout the United Nations system, including at the regional level. Several regional commissions have planned activities leading up to the Second World Assembly. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific will hold a regional preparatory consultation, to be convened in Macao, China, in September 2001, as well as other regional activities that will help shape the Second World Assembly. The Economic Commission for Europe is preparing for the World Assembly with a three-track approach that will feed into its Ministerial Conference on Ageing in 2002. The approach includes: expert meetings; intergovernmental processes/informal consultations; and the input of civil society. In Africa, the Economic Commission for Africa, in cooperation with academia, is engaged in a survey of older persons.

18. In addition, the United Nations secretariat for the Second World Assembly on Ageing organized and chaired a meeting of United Nations system organizations on 6 and 7 March 2001 to discuss preparations for the World Assembly and opportunities for future collaboration. The following items were discussed: measures to mainstream ageing into international development agendas; ways to upgrade institutional arrangements for addressing issues on ageing within the United Nations system; the contribution of the United Nations system organizations to the process of revision of the International Plan of Action on Ageing; and the participation of United Nations organizations in the Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid.

19. In October 2001, an expert group meeting will be held to explore approaches to alleviating urban and rural poverty in old age, especially among older women in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Recommendations from the meeting will contribute to the process leading to the Second World Assembly. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) will co-sponsor and organize this meeting with the United Nations programme on ageing, together with two NGOs, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and HelpAge International.

20. The Department of Public Information has started its information campaign for the Second World Assembly with the publication of the brochure *Building a Society for all Ages* as well as the unveiling of the logo for the Second World Assembly. In addition to press kits and other printed products, the information campaign will include radio and television, exhibits, and close coordination with the United Nations information centres in order to generate awareness and interest at the national level. The world famous mime, Marcel Marceau, has been designated as the Goodwill Ambassador for the Second World Assembly. At a press conference to celebrate his appointment, Mr. Marceau said that "Ageing should not be seen merely as time or numbers, rather it should be considered a process of learning, through which the contributions of the young, as well as of older persons, may enrich the world".

21. The United Nations programme on ageing published the *World Ageing Situation*,[5] a compilation of studies on global trends and emerging issues on ageing. A section on activities related to the Second World Assembly on Ageing has been added to the web site of the United Nations programme on ageing (www.un.org/desa/socdev/ageing), to highlight the preparatory process. In addition, an Internet-accessible database established by the United Nations programme on ageing provides important information on national policies and programmes on ageing and on the national organizations involved in their development and implementation.

E. Spain: host country of the Second World Assembly on Ageing

22. Spain, the host country of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, is committed to making the Assembly an historic event and to bring ageing into the forefront of global issues of the century. To ensure the success of the Assembly, an organizing committee for the Second World Assembly on Ageing, under Spain's Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, was established. The main function of the committee is to promote and coordinate preparations leading up to the Assembly and to oversee the success of the Assembly not only as a well-organized event, but also as a focus for promoting the global debate on ageing.

23. The first planning mission between the United Nations delegation and the Spanish organizing committee met in March 2001 to discuss the organizational aspects of convening the Assembly in Madrid, including conference-servicing requirements,

public information activities, security matters, accommodations and other related issues. The team also visited the Municipal Palace of Congresses of Madrid, site of the Assembly, as well as the convention centre, Feria de Madrid-IFEMA, site of the NGO Forum.

24. In order to promote and provide high visibility to the World Assembly, Spain has developed a web site giving information on activities related to the Assembly (www.madrid2002-envejecimiento.org). The site features activities in Spain and will expand its links to web sites of the United Nations system organizations, NGOs and other institutions.

Notes

[1] E/2001/71, chap. I, sect. C, decision 2001/PC/3.

[2] Ibid., chap. I, sect. A, draft decision I; to be adopted by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 2001.

[3] Ibid., draft decision II; to be adopted by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 2001.

[4] Ibid., draft resolution: to be adopted by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 2001.

[5] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.00.IV.4.